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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 000545

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/18/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR LONGER AFGHAN MANDATE IN CANADIAN SENATE

REF: A. OTTAWA 536

[B.](#) OTTAWA 373

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In a meeting with PolMinCouns on April 18, Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence Chairman Colin Kenny described a strong bipartisan consensus within his committee for a much longer-term commitment to Afghanistan than authorized by the March 13 Commons motion extending the mandate of the Canadian Forces until 2011 (ref b). The long-time Liberal Senator, who led a Committee visit (its third in three years) to Afghanistan as well as to Brussels in early April 2008, commented that it made "no sense" to set an end-date, while admitting that the minority government of Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper probably had had "no other choice" in order to gain the support of the Liberal bloc in the Commons and avoid losing a vote of confidence that would have forced a new federal election. He emphasized that, instead, "we need to look at how we can win before we decide when to leave."

¶2. (C) Senator Kenny also expressed frustration that neither the Canadian government nor NATO had laid out sufficiently explicit "metrics of success" in Afghanistan; he has also publicly criticized the Prime Minister and government for not spending more time educating the Canadian public on the importance to Canada's own national security of winning the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. He lamented that the Canadian public remained overly complacent, and expressed the fear that -- absent a significant terrorist attack inside Canada -- domestic support for what he insisted are necessary increases to Canada's national security budgets (including not only the military but also the intelligence services) will be politically impossible, even if there is a majority government after the next election (which he predicted will remain unlikely). He reiterated his frequent public complaints that Canada drastically under-invests in national security, spending only about 1.3 pct of GDP on defense, "behind only Iceland and Luxembourg" he underscored.

He commented that "Canada is a rich country, and we should be doing more," while giving credit to PM Harper for the recognition that Canada needed a more robust military capability in order to have the kind of influence it should on the world stage. He cited special concerns about the viability of the Canadian Navy and Air Force within the decade, absent major spending increases. He predicted that, even with the built-in budget increases the Conservatives had programmed, defense spending might decline to only about 0.8 pct of GDP by 2020 as the economy continues to grow.

¶3. (C) Senator Kenny said that he and his Committee colleagues had nonetheless been impressed with progress on the ground in Kandahar, and highlighted noticeably better civil-military coordination than he had last witnessed on a

visit in December 2006. However, he noted the continued "absurdity," for example, of needing "25 soldiers as escorts" for a Canadian corrections officer to travel to and from her worthwhile project at the Kandahar prison. He expressed the hope that the deployment of additional U.S. troops to Kandahar would have a major impact on changing the dynamics on the ground for the better.

¶14. (U) Senator Kenny added that he and some colleagues from the Standing Committee expected to visit Washington for meetings with counterparts during the Parliamentary recess May 19-23. PolMinCouns offered to provide all possible assistance in arranging useful meetings for the delegation.

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